

Republican members of Congress expressed dismay on Wednesday about the prospect of reaching a deal with the White House to resolve the fiscal cliff crisis before Christmas.

At the end of an hour-long briefing with House speaker John Boehner, Republican members were despondent leaving the meeting, complaining there has been little progress and there was nothing resembling a legitimate deal on the table on tax and spending.

In spite of the expressions of gloom about a deal, the fact that Obama and Boehner are still negotiating offers some hope of an eventual compromise. The Republicans also appear to be less intransigent and less ideologically driven, than they were were during the 2010 and 2011 showdowns.

Boehner, who spoke to Obama on Sunday and again Tuesday, confirmed that Obama had lowered his demand for new revenue from \$1.6tn to \$1.4tn, but still far short of the \$800bn the Republicans say they are willing to support.

Boehner said the \$1.4tn could not get through the Republican-dominated House.

The Republican majority leader, Eric Cantor, who also spoke at the Republican meeting, warned members to brace themselves for staying in Washington until Christmas Eve and to return again in the week between Christmas and New Year's Eve. The deadline for a deal on tax and spending is January 1.

"We've said we're committed to staying here. We're going to stay here right up until Christmas Eve, throughout the time and period before the New Year, because we want to make sure we resolve this in an acceptable way for the American people," Cantor said.

What makes a deal possible is that the Republicans, in spite of all their instincts to the contrary, are willing to accept tax rises in January.

They identified the biggest sticking point as the fact that Obama was not prepared to match the tax rises with deep spending cuts.

Boehner seems to have the support of his members, something he lacked in the 2010 and 2011 showdowns, when he faced resistance and even open revolt, particularly from newly-elected members backed by the Tea Party.

The meeting was held in part to bolster that support.

Republican congressman **John Campbell**, from California, after leaving the meeting, said he was unimpressed by what Obama had offered so far.

"The negotiations are nowhere. I do not know whether our president is incapable of negotiating or is not interested in it."

He added: **"It is clear that in spite of the fact that they are talking, they are getting nowhere. I have done things with the Democrats. Tell me: what spending are they willing to cut? What entitlements are they prepared to cut? Not 10 years from now. The taxes are going to go up in 20 days. They are talking about spending cuts that come into effect in 20 years. We are not going to get anywhere as long as that is their position."**

On taxes, **Campbell** said: **"We hate tax increases. We think it's a bad idea. But we have said 'all right, we will go there' – but we have had no response. The Democrats say they do not want to reform entitlements, but they will have to. Until they go there, I do not see how this is ever going to get resolved."**

Andy Harris, from Maryland, echoed **Campbell**. "The president still has not presented a plan. The president wants to increase taxes and talk about spending cuts later. That is not a plan."

Another Republican member of Congress, Marsha Blackburn, from Tennessee, chatting in the corridor outside the meeting, said: "The speaker is hanging on in there. We would like to think

the president would agree to some spending cuts."